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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 TAIPEI 004748

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/29/2015

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [TW](#)

SUBJECT: TAIWAN'S DECEMBER 3 LOCAL ELECTIONS: THEMES AND TRENDS

REF: A. TAIPEI 4646

[B](#). TAIPEI 4633

[C](#). TAIPEI 4632

[D](#). TAIPEI 4627

[E](#). TAIPEI 4602

[F](#). TAIPEI 4599

[G](#). TAIPEI 4598

[H](#). TAIPEI 4586

[I](#). TAIPEI 4553

[J](#). TAIPEI 4552 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: AIT Director Douglas Paal, Reasons: 1.4 (b/d).

[1](#). (C) Summary: Following highly negative campaigns by both major parties, Taiwan voters go to the polls Saturday December 3 to elect magistrates and mayors in 23 counties and cities. The opposition Kuomintang (KMT) has capitalized on a series of corruption scandals surrounding President Chen and the contrasting clean image of KMT party chairman Ma Ying-jeou and is playing the elections as the opening of Ma,s campaign to &win back Taiwan8 for the KMT in the 2008 presidential election. President Chen and the ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) are counterattacking on corruption issues, zeroing in on individual KMT candidates, especially Chou Hsi-wei in the critical Taipei County race. When the smoke clears, the DPP hopes to &maintain the status quo,8 while the KMT expects gains at the expense of the ruling party, with both parties focusing most intently on Taipei County. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (C) On December 3 Taiwan voters go to the polls to elect county magistrates, city majors and lower level representatives in 23 counties and cities (except in Taipei and Kaohsiung Cities, which hold elections next year). The theme for this year's elections was set when an unexpected riot by Thai workers at the Kaohsiung Mass Rapid Transit project August 21-22 led to charges of corruption and cover-up at top levels in the DPP government. The KMT has campaigned almost exclusively on the corruption theme, the DPP is now repaying in kind, and the discussion of issues has vanished. Negative campaigning and scandal mongering by both parties are turning off swing voters.

Chen Shui-bian Versus Ma Ying-jeou

[1](#)3. (C) Chen Shui-bian and Ma Ying-jeou are both stepping up their campaign activities, generating considerable media publicity for local candidates as well as for themselves. Due to the DPP,s corruption scandals, President Chen is no longer the drawing card he once was, however, and some candidates and local officials have even said that they view Chen as &poison at the box office.8 KMT candidates, on the other hand, are capitalizing on Ma,s reputation for personal integrity and their expectation that Ma will be the next president. Posters displaying Ma together with local KMT candidates are extremely common in most districts, while we have observed no similar posters of Chen with DPP candidates. Ma Ying-jeou,s visits have made a difference in some districts, according to AIT,s contacts.

The KMT Trying to Stay on the Attack

[1](#)4. (C) The KMT is trying to keep the public focus on DPP corruption and ineffectiveness, the issues which put the DPP on the defensive in the first place. The KMT and its supporters have been working to exacerbate the existing scandal involving former senior presidential advisor Chen Che-nan, but the public may be growing weary of this aging story. National Security Council (NSC) Secretary General Chiou I-jen suggested to the Director that the Kaohsiung Prosecutor's indictment of Chen Che-nan for breach of trust (not corruption) on November 21 will diminish the effectiveness of the KMT attacks and help stop the decline in public support for the DPP. To drive home its election theme, the KMT held a large-scale &anti-corruption8 march and rally on November 27 in Taipei City where there is no election but there are many KMT supporters and much media coverage.

The DPP Counterattack

15. (C) The initial DPP response to KMT attacks was to present the December 3 elections as local contests between individual candidates rather than as a KMT-DPP showdown. Extensive media coverage of the Kaohsiung metro scandal persuaded many potential voters that the DPP was the problem, however. In Taipei County, for example, many analysts said that popular DPP candidate Luo Wen-jia could be dragged to defeat by public dissatisfaction over DPP corruption. As a result, the DPP is now turning the tables on the KMT, focusing on corruption allegations involving individual KMT candidates and a more general charge that the KMT has always been corrupt, as demonstrated by the massive 1991 Lafayette frigate scandal, and is still corrupt despite Ma Ying-jeou. It is too early to say how effective this new strategy will be, but it is clearly influencing some key races. In Taipei County, Luo Wen-jia has virtually closed the gap with KMT candidate Chou Hsi-wei by zeroing in relentlessly on Chou's alleged use of political influence to gain special breaks in financial dealings. Chou's exceedingly weak responses to the attacks, including a crying episode at a campaign appearance, seem to have played into the hands of Luo, who has come across as a stronger leader.

16. (C) DPP officials are worried that significant numbers of DPP supporters may choose not to vote on December 3, either out of discouragement over charges of DPP corruption or because they want to teach a lesson to party leaders, especially President Chen. In order to mobilize its base and bring out the vote, the DPP has accelerated its campaign tempo, with party leaders holding several major rallies per day throughout the island, including a series of large-scale rallies on the &super-Sunday preceding the election (November 27). In addition to the core theme of KMT corruption, DPP leaders, especially President Chen, sometimes strike other standard party themes as well, for example, that the DPP is the defender of Taiwan's interests against opposition politicians who would sell out to China and that the DPP faithful must rally around the party in crisis. In the final days prior to the elections, Chen's strong campaign rhetoric could have an effect in some districts, increasing participation by the party's base voters.

KMT and DPP Hopes and Expectations -----

17. (C) The KMT and DPP each expect to retain control of core districts in their respective base areas, the KMT in the north and the DPP in the south. AIT's contacts and other political observers here expect the DPP to suffer net losses of perhaps one to three districts on December 3. The KMT is focused above all on wresting control from the DPP of &super-battleground Taipei County, which has about sixteen percent of Taiwan's total population. A substantial number of races, including Taipei County, remain close, and the large numbers of undecided voters coupled with the effects of final campaign surges, particularly by the DPP, make it difficult to predict the final results. NSC Secretary General Chiou I-jen told the Director that President Chen thinks the DPP can win ten races and maintain the &status quo.8 The DPP focus is on the critical race in Taipei County, Chiou added, because if the DPP loses Taipei County, the feeling will be that the DPP has lost the elections even if the party wins ten districts. KMT Central Committee Secretary General Chan Chuen-po told AIT that according to

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the party's internal polling, KMT candidates currently enjoy stable leads in seven counties and cities, DPP candidates have stable leads in only three counties and cities, and there are eleven close races.

18. (C) The following list represents a composite view of the current status of the December 3 elections, based on estimates from AIT's DPP and KMT contacts and other observers.

DPP Leading:

Chiayi County
Tainan County
Tainan City
Kaohsiung County
Pingtung County

KMT Leading:

Taoyuan County
Hsinchu County
Hsinchu City
Taichung County
Taichung City
Hualien County
Taitung County

DPP Leaning:

Yunlin County

KMT Leaning:

Miaoli County

Nantou County

Chiayi City

Penghu County

Up for Grabs:

Taipei County

Ilan County

Changhua County

Keelung City

Note: This list excludes Kinmen and Matsu, governed by pan-Blue New Party and People First Party (PFP) magistrates respectively. In Taitung County, the KMT candidate, who is appealing his corruption conviction, is running as an independent. In Keelung City, the DPP candidate withdrew in favor of the Taiwan Solidarity Union candidate, who is running against KMT and PFP opponents. End Note.

Comment

19. (C) While these are local elections, observers here view them as a major test of strength between the present DPP leader, President Chen, and the presumed 2008 KMT presidential candidate, Ma Ying-jeou. The victor will be assessed by two measures: which party wins the largest single prize, Taipei County magistrate; and whether or not the KMT meets pre-election expectations for a significant gain at the expense of the DPP in the total number of magistrate and mayoral seats it occupies.

Paal